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NSC BRIEFING NOTES

DOCUMENT NO. 14  
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐  
11 DECLASSIFIED  
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C  
NEXT REVIEW DATE: 6/19/80  
AUTH: HR 70  
DATE: 7-16-80 REVIEWER: 372044

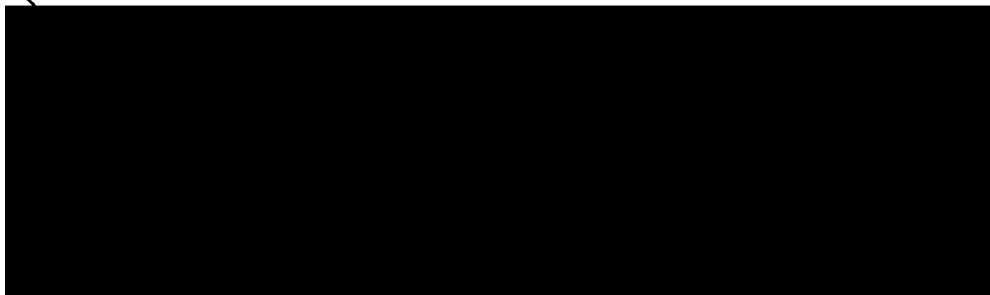
CABINET CRISIS IN THAILAND

- I. A serious political crisis may be developing in Thailand as a result of the resignations from the cabinet of Defense Minister, <sup>General</sup> Sarit, several of his closest followers, <sup>Both he</sup> and the air force and navy chiefs, *who resigned their cabinet positions, retained their service commands.*
- A. The resignations were followed by orders issued by Sarit and Police Director General Phao, placing the army and police on alert status, and A competent American observer has stated that the "battle lines are clearly drawn."
- II. This latest flareup of political tension in Bangkok was apparently set off by Premier Phibun's recent order to cabinet ministers to sever their lucrative links with government and commercial corporations or resign.
- A. Some reports have suggested that Phibun's move was directed primarily against the Sarit clique.
- B. This contention may have some validity in view of the fact that Phao, in contrast to the resigning ministers, has announced that he will divest himself of his commercial interests rather than give up the Interior Ministry. *Incidentally, Phao's wife is a better business man than he is.*
- III. The Army alert, however, suggests that Sarit may be attempting to turn the tattle on Phibun.

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- B. Phao's presence in the cabinet has, in any event, been a source of extreme irritation to Sarit ever since Phibun allegedly assured him last March that Phao would be permitted to retain only his post as police chief.

IV. Despite the current tense situation -- the latest in a series during the past several months -- there remains a good chance it will be resolved peacefully, and without seriously upsetting the long standing political alignments.

- A. This may be achieved by reverting to the arrangement in existence prior to the February elections under which Phibun himself held the defense and interior portfolios with Sarit and Phao acting respectively as deputy ministers.
- B. Another possible solution might be the appointment of neutral individuals as defense and interior ministers.